

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

CONSERVATION COVER

(Acre)  
Code 327

**DEFINITION**

Establishing and maintaining vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources on land retired from agricultural production or other lands requiring protective cover.

**PURPOSES**

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to support one or more of the following purposes.

- Provide habitat for declining species.
- Restore native plant communities.
- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Restore, create, or enhance wildlife habitat.

**CONDITIONS WHERE THIS PRACTICE APPLIES**

On land retired from agricultural production or other lands requiring protective cover, including land entered into retirement programs. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes Stated Above**

Vegetative species shall be adapted to soil-site conditions.

Vegetative species will be suitable for the planned purpose.

Planting rates will be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose. (References include but not

limited to Florida Technical Notes, Plant Materials Section; National Biology Manual; and, Range Management For Important Native Grasses of Florida.)

Planting dates, and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting stock will ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival.

Only viable, high quality, and adapted seed or seedling stock will be used.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

Grasses, forbs, and legumes when planted together shall be planted in a manner and rates that will ensure survival of forbs and legumes.

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose. Application of nutrients and pest control will be in conformance with NRCS Florida conservation practice standard Nutrient Management, Code 590, and Pest Management, Code 595.

Maintenance measures shall be provided to control severe outbreaks of noxious weeds and other invasive species in order to comply with state noxious weed laws.

Erosion rates shall be held to, or below, soil loss tolerance.

**Additional Criteria For Enhancing Wildlife Habitat**

**Planting/Establishment.** Selection and planting rates shall be made based on values to the wildlife

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

under consideration, guidance is found in the NRCS National Biology Manual as supplemented.

Planned watering facilities will be in conformance with NRCS Florida conservation practice standard Wildlife Watering Facility, code 648.

**Management/maintenance.** Vegetative manipulation to maximize plant and animal diversity shall be accomplished by prescribed burning or mechanical, biological or chemical methods, or a combination of the four. All burning will be in conformance with NRCS Florida conservation practice standard Prescribed Burning, Code 338.

A reduction in general agricultural seeding rates shall be used for wildlife plantings to create an open structure that allows increased forb production and wildlife movement.

Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the primary nesting period. Strip maintenance practices of the area is acceptable based on the operation and maintenance plan.

To benefit insect food sources for nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

#### **Additional Criteria For Improving Water Quality**

Appropriate conservation practices will be installed where erosion is occurring; adjacent to water bodies, wetlands, sinks, and/or other sensitive areas; and/or other areas where water quality may be impaired.

These NRCS Florida practices standards include but are not limited to Riparian Forest Buffer, Code 392; Critical Area Planting, Code 342; Filter Strip, Code 393A; and Field Border, Code 386.

The width of all buffers must be adequate to protect the area of concern from wind and water borne sediments.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

When this practice is used, consideration should be given for promoting the conservation of declining species, including threatened and endangered species.

The use of native species (grasses, forbs and legumes) should be encouraged for all cover situations.

Consideration should be given to rotating management/maintenance treatments throughout the managed area.

The food and cover value of the planting can be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure to aid in selecting plant species and providing or managing for other habitat requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for generic weed control is not recommended.

In riparian areas, consider the use of native plant communities for conservation cover.

If a native cover comes up other than what was planted and it meets the intended purpose and the landowners objectives the cover should be considered adequate.

Where the site is erosive and has concentrated runoff, combinations of erosion control practices should be considered to provide the most desirable benefits.

## **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

A plan providing the intended purpose, planting dates, species and maintenance measures for the life of this practice will be provided. Where appropriate the wildlife species managed for and maintenance practices for the wildlife will be provided.

**REFERENCES**

NRCS National Biology Manual  
NRCS Florida Technical Notes  
Range Management For Important Native Grasses  
of Florida  
NRCS conservation practice standards  
Nutrient Management, Code 590  
Pest Management, Code 595  
Prescribed Burning, Code 338  
Critical Area Planting, Code 342  
Riparian Forest Buffer, Code 392  
Filter Strip, Code 393A  
Field Border, Code 386  
Wildlife Watering Facility, Code 648